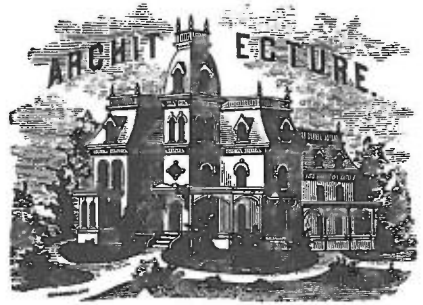


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Antoine Dorticos
1848-1906

During the 1880s and 1890s, Antoine Dorticos designed a series of fine Queen Anne and Shingle Style cottages and pioneered the Casco Bay islands as a fashionable summer retreat for local families. Despite the fact that some of his best buildings survive, along with six plans published in *Scientific American Building Monthly*, Dorticos and his work have been completely forgotten. The reasons for this neglect stem from the part-time nature of his practice and the success of such better known contemporaries as John Calvin Stevens.

The architect was the son of Piedro Dorticos, a wealthy planter from Cienfuegos, Cuba. The family estate, "The Flora", was destroyed in a political upheaval, and Antoine was sent to study in Paris.¹ At about the age of eighteen, he came to Maine to continue his studies. Portland was probably chosen because of its close trade relations with Cuba.²

Dorticos apparently attended Gorham Academy and Westbrook Seminary (now Westbrook College) before taking a teaching position at the Eaton School in Norridgewock.³ He first appeared in the *Portland Directory* in 1877. Dorticos was listed as a draftsman



Figure 1. Antoine Dorticos Cottage, Great Chebeague Island, 1988 view (MHPC).

and was at some point employed as such by the Portland Company, which produced railroad locomotives and marine engines.⁴ Not until 1882 did his name again appear in the directory, this time as a French teacher. During this period he wed Sarah Bates, a marriage which produced two sons, Philip and Carlos.⁵

How Antoine Dorticós first became interested in architecture is not known. He received his initial training in the office of Francis H. Fassett, Portland's leading Victorian architect, who was also the mentor of John Calvin Stevens, Frederick A. Tompson, and other architects of the period. In addition, Dorticós probably attended the free mechanical drawing classes offered by John Calvin Stevens at the Maine Charitable Mechanic Association, but there is no actual documentation of such a relationship. Still, both men were vigorous proponents of the Shingle Style and, by the end of the 1880s, Dorticós took Stevens' place as instructor for the Mechanic Association.⁶

Antoine Dorticós was first noted as an architect in 1886.⁷ However, his influence on the shape of domestic architecture in the Portland area had begun even earlier. A late nineteenth century newspaper claimed that:

...the first Portland citizen to suggest and enjoy a sojourn in a cottage at the islands (in Casco Bay) was not a native either of this city or the country. It was nearly twenty years ago that Prof. Antonio (sic) Dorticós, teacher of French at the Portland High School, but then a student here, suggested to friends the idea of making the islands a place of summer residence. They began camping on Cushing's Island. They were not the first campers in the harbor, of course, but when about seventeen years ago they hired rooms in a private house on Peaks they were the first Portland people to do such a thing...⁸

Though noting that Canadian visitors had long visited the island hotels, the article credits Dorticós with the concept of renting rooms and influencing Charles Parsons to build two cottages on Peak's Island:

They were occupied by Mr. Dorticós and his wife and her relatives. It remained therefore for a foreigner to start the movement among us to enjoy the unrivaled opportunity for summer homes. Mr. Dorticós brought from France the appreciation of the French for such delightful resorts as our islands afford, and when he came here expressed surprise that Portland people did not live down the harbor during the hot weather. He immediately began to do so and has done so ever since.⁹

While Dorticós initially summered on Cushing's Island and Peak's Island, by 1885 he had purchased a parcel of the Ricker Farm at the west end of Great Chebeague Island and built a cottage there for himself on Cottage Road.¹⁰ When that structure burned in 1894, he replaced it with the present Shingle Style summer house which is still used by his descendants.¹¹ This design is distinguished by its sloping

roof which extends to form a porch that ends at the corner with an attached gazebo (Figure 1). Adjacent to this is a broad arched entrance porch.

Next to the Dorticós Cottage is the Thompson Cottage, a gambrel roofed Shingle Style summer home which both appearance and oral tradition indicate is the work of the architect. Nearby on Cottage Road are two additional Shingle Style cottages which feature many motifs used by Dorticós and easily could have been designed by him.¹² His other contribution to Chebeague Island architecture was the remodelling of the 1855 Methodist Church in 1886.¹³ Dorticós removed the original spire in order to add to the facade a gable roofed entry which supports a square bell tower.

It seems probable that Dorticós' entry into the field of architecture was an attempt to capitalize on the growing acceptance of his idea of summer leisure. His biographical notice in *Leading Business Men of Portland*, published in 1887, stressed "artistic, low-priced seaside cottages and houses" as a specialty. Still, he claimed to be "able to perform all kinds of Architectural work..."¹⁴ The same statement contained something of a paradox, buried in the man's view of his field:

The talent and scientific research which of late years have adorned the work of the best Architects, have raised this work from that of a craft to the position of an honored profession. To meet the searching demands of modern artistic culture and sanitary education, the Architect of today must have the benefits of a liberal training and a marked ability for the work, no others having a right to the name.¹⁵

Although Dorticós clearly possessed superior skill as a designer, he was the product of an informal education process himself. Indeed, his subsequent career appears as an unsuccessful struggle to achieve full-time status as an architect.

Twenty-one projects by Dorticós have been identified to date. They probably represent only a small number of his "many artistic cottages along the coast of Maine".¹⁶ Three designs stand out from the cottages, which constituted the majority of his work. All three date from 1888. The Moosilauke was a frame Shingle Style hotel at Breezy Point, New Hampshire. It is his only large commercial commission yet identified, suggesting that his ability could transcend smaller structures.¹⁷ His Free Church of Deering (Stevens Avenue Congregational Church) in Portland is a simple Queen Anne Style building with an attractive tower.¹⁸ The final anomalous project is "Cragmere", the summer home of George M. Conarrore of Philadelphia at York Cliffs (Figures 2 & 3). Sited by itself in a spectacular location, this impressive Shingle Style residence is more a home than a cottage, or at least the kind of cottages Dorticós usually designed. The use of a central core of stone and wood, a tower, a great porch, and a unifying gambrel roof shows



Figure 2. "Cragmere", George M. Conarroe Cottage, York, c. 1895 view (MHPC).



Figure 3. Conarroe Cottage, York, 1988 view (MHPC).

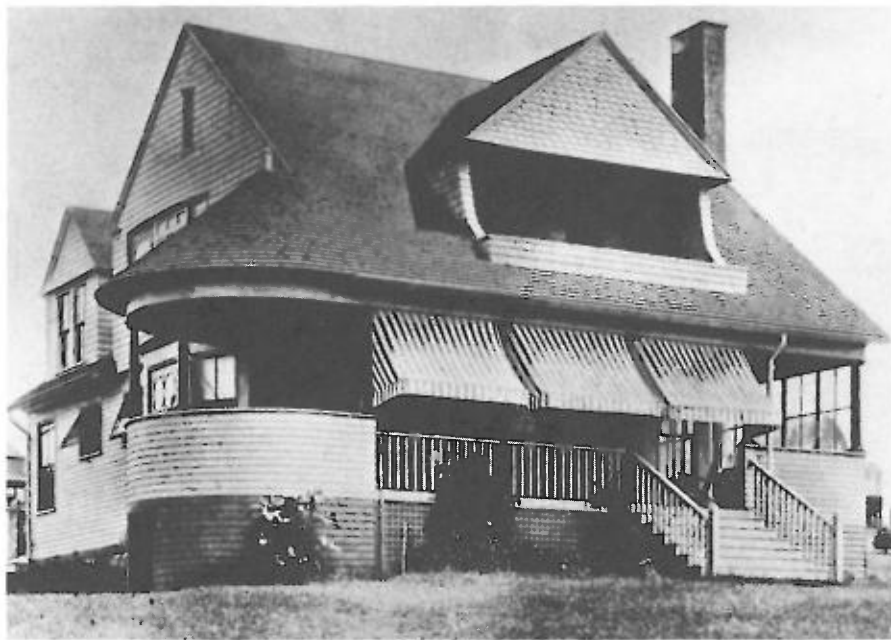


Figure 4. Edwin L. Goding Cottage, Great Diamond Island, 1895 view
(Courtesy of Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc.).

great sophistication that ranks this work with those of better known contemporaries. Also of note is a large frame Shingle Style cottage by Dorticos which Conarro built on his property, perhaps as a guest house.¹⁹

The more typical projects undertaken by the architect combined style with low cost. The Dr. Charles M. Talbot Cottage on Great Diamond Island was built as early as 1885, although the plans were not published until seven years later.²⁰ Built at a cost of nine hundred dollars, its dimensions and appearance were:

Front, 28 feet 6 inches; side, 41 feet, exclusive of piazza. Height of first story ceiling, 9 feet; second, 8 feet. Underpinning, brick on stone footings. The exterior frame-work is sheathed and the first story is clapboarded and painted light olive green, with bottle green trimmings; second story shingled and painted red; roof shingled. The design is of the Queen Anne style, and it is provided with a wide piazza across the front and side.²¹

By 1886 Dorticos had prepared plans for the Lewis A. Goudy Cottage on Great Diamond, a gambrel roofed Shingle Style cottage with a large, first story piazza and a smaller enclosed balcony on the second.²² The G. W. Beale Cottage was built on Great



Figure 5. Goding Cottage, Great Diamond Island, 1895 view
(Courtesy of Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc.).

Diamond the following season at a cost of \$1,470. Though similar in concept, its roof and overall lines are more graceful and fluid.²³ By now Dorticós had developed a mastery of the Shingle Style. Even more sculptural in appearance was the Alfred A. Kendall Cottage, also located on Great Diamond (Figure 6). Completed at a cost of two thousand dollars, it must rank as one of the architect's best efforts.²⁴ Less expensive buildings were still possible, for in 1891 the Ansel R. Doten Cottage cost only eight hundred dollars. For the same price Dorticós designed Doten another slightly larger cottage.²⁵ In 1892 Dorticós delivered plans for Edwin L. Goding's new summer cottage, the earlier one having been lost to fire.²⁶ The new Queen Anne cottage was larger, more elaborate and, if more playful, less graceful (Figures 4 & 5). According to the *Scientific American Building Edition*:

The design presents a very picturesque exterior, with several features that give the building an artistic effect. The spacious and well shaded piazza, balconies, chimney and tower are some of the features. The cellar is excavated, and the building is supported on cedar posts with stone foundations. It is enclosed with lattice work, and it has an inside and outside entrance thereto. The first story is clapboarded, while the second and third stories are shingled. It is painted a silver gray. The columns at front piazza are finished natural with hard oil. Roof shingled, and painted red.²⁷

In late nineteenth century Portland, Dorticós was known as a gifted teacher. He taught French at Portland High School.²⁸ In the late 1880s, he took over the drawing classes at the Mechanic Association. Attendance had been dropping, but improved "under the efficient instruction of Mr. Antonio (sic) Dorticós". In 1889 he was elected a member of that organization.²⁹

Although research has provided few details about Dorticós' personal life, it is clear that in spite of his good reputation, he was never able to establish himself as a full-time architect. The family moved to various rents, and eventually the sons grew up. Philip became a chemist at the Dana Warp Mills in Westbrook, and Carlos served in the Spanish-American War and graduated as a engineer from the University of Maine in 1903.³⁰ In 1906 Antoine and Sarah were living alone in a new rent on Orland Street.³¹ On May 19th, apparently depressed by overwork, he walked into Portland, greeted a friend, went to Federal Street, pulled out a revolver, and shot himself.³²

The community was stunned, for on the same day a former city councilor, Frank L. Howe, committed suicide in a similar manner. Both deaths filled the front page and then were quickly forgotten. The architect left no firm or students to follow in his footsteps, and no original drawings have been discovered. Still, the projects that have been identified suggest a lively and substantive talent. Coupled with his role in popularizing the Casco Bay islands as a vacation spot, it is clear that his influence was considerable. Future research should include more detailed comparisons with the work of other Shingle Style designers and a continued effort to discover more buildings by Antoine Dorticós.

William David Barry



Figure 6. Alfred A. Kendall Cottage, Great Diamond Island, 1892 view (Courtesy of Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc.).

NOTES

- ¹ *Portland Sunday Telegram*, May 20, 1906, p. 1. For general information about the Dorticos family, see Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: Pursuit of Freedom*, New York, 1971, pp. 98-99, 185.
- ² For additional information about Portland's Cuban connection, see period newspapers and N. M. Fox, *A History of That Part of the Fox Family Descended from Thomas Fox of Cambridge, Massachusetts*, St. Joseph, Missouri, 1899, pp. 43-57. Horatio Fox of Portland built a plantation in Cuba, wed a local woman, and raised fifteen children. He served as American Consul from 1868 to 1878 and later returned as clerk of the Portland Custom House.
- ³ *Daily Eastern Argus*, Portland, May 21, 1906, p. 12. Dorothy Healy of the Maine Women Writers Collection at Westbrook College, Portland, notes that many Cuban students attended the Seminary in the nineteenth century.
- ⁴ *Argus*, *op. cit.*; *Portland Directory*, 1877.
- ⁵ *Portland Evening Express*, May 19, 1906, p. 1.
- ⁶ *Constitution of the Maine Charitable Mechanic Association*, Portland, 1965, pp. 28-29. Stevens taught "architectural drawing."
- ⁷ *Portland Directory*, 1886; *Leading Business Men of Portland*, Portland, 1887, p. 165. Dorticos' earliest known cottage was built in 1885 for Dr. Charles M. Talbot on Great Diamond Island, according to Portland tax records at the Portland Public Library.
- ⁸ "The First Cottager", *Portland Transcript*, August 9, 1893.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Cumberland County Registry of Deeds, Portland, Vol. 499, p. 234.
- ¹¹ *Industrial Journal*, Bangor, August 24, 1894.
- ¹² Information about these three cottages is found in the Chebeague Island architectural survey, which was made available to the author by Donna Damon, an island resident.
- ¹³ *The Church on Chebeague, 1802-1960*, Chebeague Island, 1960, pp. 34, 40-41.
- ¹⁴ *Leading Business Men*, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *Argus*, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁷ *Portland Daily Press*, October 29, 1888. A photograph of the Moosilauke is on file at the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta.
- ¹⁸ *Portland Daily Press* and *Lewiston Evening Journal*, October 31, 1887; *Portland Evening Express*, October 18, 1886.
- ¹⁹ *Portland Daily Press*, October 29, 1888, *Industrial Journal*, Bangor, November 2, 1888. For information about the client, George M. Conarroe, see John W. Jordan, *Colonial Families of Philadelphia*, New York and Chicago, 1911, Vol. 1, pp. 187-189.
- ²⁰ See note 7. *Scientific American Architects and Builders Edition*, New York, February, 1892.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² *Portland Daily Press*, October 27, 1886.

- ²³ *Portland Daily Press*, October 27, 1886; January 31, 1887. *Scientific American Architects and Builders Edition*, April, 1892.
- ²⁴ *Scientific American Architects and Builders Edition*, May, 1892.
- ²⁵ *Scientific American Architects and Builders Edition*, December, 1891 and November, 1894.
- ²⁶ *Portland Daily Press*, October 27, 1886; January 31, 1887. *Portland Transcript*, April 27, 1892; May 18, 1892.
- ²⁷ *Scientific American Builders Edition*, July, 1895.
- ²⁸ *The Racquet*, June, 1906, p. 17. This Portland High School publication carried a moving obituary.
- ²⁹ *Mechanic Association*, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
- ³⁰ Linwood S. Elliott, *The University of Maine Engineers*, Falmouth, 1985, p. 38. *Argus*, *op. cit.*
- ³¹ *Portland Directory*, 1906.
- ³² *Argus*, *op. cit.*

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY ANTOINE DORTICOS

Antoine Dorticos Cottage, Great Chebeague Island, Cumberland, by 1885, Destroyed by fire in 1894
 Dr. Charles M. Talbot Cottage, Great Diamond Island, Portland, 1885, Extant
 Lewis A. Goudy Cottages (2), Great Diamond Island, Portland, 1886, Unlocated
 Methodist Church, Great Chebeague Island, Cumberland, 1886, Remodelling, Extant
 George W. Beale Cottage, Great Diamond Island, Portland, 1887, Extant
 Edwin L. Goding Cottage, Great Diamond Island, Portland, 1887, Destroyed by fire in 1892
 Ellen Ware Cottage, Cushing's Island, Portland, 1887, Not Executed
 Free Church (Stevens Avenue Congregational Church), 788 Stevens Avenue, Portland, 1887-88, Altered
 Ansel R. Doten Cottage, Great Diamond Island, Portland, 1888, Unlocated
 Alfred A. Kendall Cottage, Great Diamond Island, Portland, 1888, Destroyed in 1905
 "Cragmere", George M. Conarroe Cottage, Bald Head Cliff, York, 1888-89, Extant
 Conarroe Cottage, York Cliffs, York, 1888-89, Extant
 Gardner Cram House, Brunswick, 1889, Porch Additions, Unlocated
 Ansel R. Doten Cottage, Great Diamond Island, Portland, 1891, Destroyed by fire in 1892
 Edwin L. Goding Cottage, Great Diamond Island, Portland, 1892, Extant
 Antoine Dorticos Cottage, Great Chebeague Island, Cumberland, c. 1894, Extant
 Thompson Cottage, Great Chebeague Island, Cumberland, c. 1895, Extant

Non-Maine Commissions

General Hill House, Phoenix, Arizona, 1888, Unlocated
 W. F. Lunt House, Phoenix, Arizona, 1888, Unlocated
 Moosilauke Hotel, Breezy Point, New Hampshire, 1888, Destroyed

Photograph of Antoine Dorticos
 Courtesy of Mrs. Arthur F. Mead

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